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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 004797

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIA HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDUP: PROTEST PREVENTED,
ABDULLAHS CONVICTED, DALILA HEALTH DECLINING

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: Security services used limited force to prevent a demonstration October 5 in downtown Damascus, which had been called for by three leading Kurdish parties and publicly supported by the Damascus Declaration group and the externally based National Salvation Front. Security agents surrounded and struck Kurdish leaders and Damascus Declaration group leader Riad Seif as they shook hands on the site of the planned protest, quickly moving all participants by force from the scene. Separately, on October 4, a Mezzeh Military Court judge convicted political activist Ali Abdullah and his son Mohammed of spreading lies about Syria in articles and interviews. The Abdullahs were each sentenced to six-months in prison and fined about USD 20. They were expected to be released October 5, after having already spent more than six months in prison. In other news, there are public reports that jailed Damascus Spring detainee Aref Dalila, who is Alawite, may have suffered a stroke in prison and that he continues to demand private medical treatment. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Security services used limited force to prevent a demonstration October 5 in downtown Damascus, which had been called for by three leading Kurdish parties and supported by the Damascus Declaration group and the externally based National Salvation Front. The demonstration was called to mark the 44th anniversary of the census in Hassakeh that deprived tens of thousands of Kurds of their nationality, according to Kurdish officials. Leading figures from the Yekiti and Azadi parties and the Future Movement gathered on a corner near the Prime Minister's office, along with Damascus Declaration leader Riad Seif, and were shaking hands, when riot police swarmed the gathering, hitting and moving all of the opposition leaders by force several blocks down the street. The overwhelming number of security officials prevented any gathering of other Kurds and opposition figures who had come to Seven Lakes Square near the PM's office. As of early in the afternoon October 5, there were no reports of arrests.

13. (SBU) ABDULLAHS CONVICTED: On October 4, a Mezzeh Military Court judge convicted political activist Ali Abdullah and his son Mohammed of spreading lies about Syria in articles and interviews. The Abdullahs were each sentenced to six-months in prison and fined about USD 20. They were expected to be released October 5, after having already spent more than six months in prison. The Abdullahs were acquitted of charges of insulting Syria's President Bashar al-Asad and the court. By way of background, Ali and

Mohammed Abdullah were arrested March 23 and held incommunicado for almost a month before appearing in court. In 2005, Ali Abdullah was imprisoned for six months after reading a letter from Muslim Brotherhood chief Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni at an Atassi Forum meeting. Mohammed has also been active in Syrian civil society and was arrested and convicted of defaming the homeland in September 2005 after launching a support group for political prisoners' families. Another son of Ali, Omar, has been detained since March 18 by Syrian Air Force Intelligence for his association with a group of student activists.

14. (C) DALILA'S HEALTH WORSENING: The longest-serving Damascus Spring detainee, Aref Dalila, who is about 63-years-old, may have suffered a stroke in prison as a result of an ongoing heart condition, according to local activists here and an October statement by Amnesty International (AI). The left side of Dalila's body is numb and his left foot and hand are swollen, according to AI. The SARG has offered to provide medical treatment, including surgery, to Dalila, who insists on care independent of prison authorities, according to family members of another jailed activist, Kamal Labwani. Dalila, who is Alawite, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his involvement in the Damascus Spring movement, as opposed to others, such as Labwani, who in 2001 received three- to five-year sentences. Dalila, who also suffers from diabetes, is being held in solitary confinement, according to AI. (Note. The SARG has a sustained history of treating Alawite dissenters with disproportionate harshness as they are seen as traitors.)

15. (SBU) JAMMOUS TRIAL CONTINUES: On October 2, opposition activist Fateh Jammous appeared in Criminal Court and told the presiding judge that he had never seen the official

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charges against him. Jammous, nonetheless, offered a statement in his own defense, which was eventually cut short by the judge. The judge promised to issue her decision about bail for Jammous within days. A verdict was expected in the case at the next session scheduled for December 21. Jammous, also an Alawite and head of the Communist Action Party, was arrested May 1 at the Damascus Airport and first charged two weeks later with encouraging sectarian civil war, which carries a minimum life sentence. The charges were apparently based on two public meetings Jammous held in Stockholm and London with Syrian expatriates to discuss the situation in Syria, according to a lawyer on Jammous' defense team. In June, the charges against Jammous were reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor, punishable by up to six months in prison. (Note. Jammous has previously served 18 years detention as a prisoner of conscience in Syria.)

16. (C) PALESTINIAN ACTIVISTS ARRESTED: Two Palestinian members of Rased, a Palestinian human rights group based in Sidon, Lebanon, were arrested September 26 and charged with affiliation with an unlicensed organization, according to regional media. Rased called upon the SARG to intervene with its security agencies for the immediate release of Saher Ali al-Salih and Samir Yusuf Bakkur, according to Al-Jazira, citing a release from the human rights organization. Neither the detainees nor their families had been in contact with local human rights organizations in Damascus as of early October, according to an Embassy FSN with excellent contacts in the human rights community.

17. (SBU) KURDS RELEASED: Three Kurdish activists were released in recent weeks, including writer Mohammed Ghanem, who served out his six-month sentence for insulting President Bashar al-Asad, according to press reports and local human rights organizations. Also released was Hasan Abdo, an engineering student who had served out his 2 1/2-year sentence for inciting sectarianism in connection with the March 2004 riots in Qamishli, according to a press release from the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria (NOHR). Finally, 65-year-old Abdo Khalaf Wallo was released

after 3 1/2 months in detention, due to his bad health condition, according to the NOHR statement. There were no further details about the reasons behind his arrest.

18. (C) Comment. Seif's presence at the Kurdish demonstration was an interesting development. The full significance of it is something we will report on as we discuss it with our Kurdish contacts in the next week. Seif is, however, making an effort to persuade leaders of the Future Movement, and the Yekiti and Azadi parties to sign the Damascus Declaration.

CORBIN